

**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME**  
**Eastern Sierra & Inland Deserts Region**

**DEER ZONE X12 and ARCHERY HUNT A20**  
**Deer Hunting Information**

This information has been prepared to assist you in getting ready for your hunt after you have received a general season deer tag for Zone X12 or an A20 archery deer tag in Zone X12. Zone X12 is located entirely within the northern-half of Mono County from approximately Conway Summit north to the California-Nevada state line. The zone boundaries, as described in the CALIFORNIA HUNTING REGULATIONS (MAMMALS AND FURBEARERS) are as follows:

That portion of Mono County within a line beginning at the junction of the California-Nevada state line and Highway 167 (Pole Line Road); west on Highway 167 to Highway 395; north on Highway 395 to Virginia Lakes Road; west on Virginia Lakes Road to the Virginia Lakes Trail (Entry Trail D11); northwest on the Virginia Lakes Trail to the Mono-Tuolumne county line; north along the Mono-Tuolumne county line to the Mono-Alpine county line; northeast along the Mono-Alpine county line to Indian Springs Road; northeast on Indian Springs Road to the California-Nevada state line; southeast on the California-Nevada state line to the point of beginning.

All hunters should be familiar with regulations in the current CALIFORNIA HUNTING REGULATIONS (MAMMALS AND FURBEARERS) booklet available online at the Department of Fish and Game's website: [www.dfg.ca.gov/licensing/biggame/biggamehunting.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/licensing/biggame/biggamehunting.html). Laws, designed to conserve wildlife and provide an equitable distribution of game animals, are expected to encourage hunter ethics. Those who know and understand the rules can expect an enjoyable hunting experience. Articles on big game hunting and information about how to apply for deer tags may be found in the current year's BIG GAME HUNTING booklet available where hunting licenses are sold or online at [www.dfg.ca.gov/licensing/biggame/biggamehunting.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/licensing/biggame/biggamehunting.html)

The majority of Zone X12 is public land administered by the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), Toiyabe National Forest (760)932-7070 or U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Bishop Office (760)872-5000. Large tracts of private land occur within the zone primarily within the Bridgeport Valley, Bodie Hills, Sonora Junction, and Antelope Valley areas. You must obtain written permission to hunt on private property; hunter trespass laws are strictly enforced. Popular and well known geographic features in the zone include the eastern Sierra Nevada and its numerous rivers, creeks, and lakes. Some of these drainages include Virginia Creek, Green Creek, Robinson Creek, East Walker River, Buckeye Creek, Molybdenite Creek, Little Walker River, and the West Walker River. Other well-known areas include the Bodie Hills, Sweetwater Mountains, Bridgeport Valley, Antelope Valley, and the Slinkard and Little Antelope Valley Wildlife Areas.

U.S. Highway 395 is the primary route of access through the zone. This major highway bisects the zone in a north-south direction, passing through the communities of Bridgeport, Walker, and Coleville. Other major highways within the zone that can be accessed from Highway 395 include Highway 167 (Pole Line Road), Highway 108 (Sonora Pass Road), Highway 89 (Monitor Pass Road), Highway 270 (Bodie Road), and Highway 182 (Yerington Road). These highways provide access to numerous improved and unimproved dirt roads (Forest Routes) that penetrate portions of the zone's interior. Many areas of quality deer habitat located on public lands are readily accessible by vehicle using these forest routes. These routes are depicted on the Toiyabe National Forest Bridgeport Ranger District Map and topographic maps of the area.

## **OVERVIEW OF DEER DISTRIBUTION AND MOVEMENT**

Deer ranging east of the Sierra Nevada crest in Inyo and Mono counties (Zones X9A, X9B, X9C, and X12) are a subspecies of mule deer known as Inyo mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus inyoensis*). The Inyo mule deer can be distinguished by its large white rump patch and a tail that is black only at the tip. Deer in Zone X12 are migratory, spending summers at higher elevations (7,500-11,000 feet) in the Sierra Nevada and winters at lower elevations (5,000-7,500 feet) in both the northeastern portion of Mono County, California, and also the western Douglas and Lyon counties, Nevada. Deer migration between these winter and summer ranges occurs twice annually, once during spring and then again in the fall.

Migrations generally follow traditional routes oriented along major topographic features, such as drainages or the bases of mountain ranges. Spring migration from the winter range is generally triggered by the “green-up” of nutritious annual grasses and forbs. During spring migration, deer gradually move from lower to higher elevations as they forage on these emerging plants and slowly regain body condition lost over the winter. Deer arrive on the summer range by mid-May, and pregnant does begin to establish fawning territories in areas containing thick cover, adequate water, and quality forage. Fawns are born in July, and by early August they are large enough to follow the doe as she moves about her summer home range.

Fall migration back to the winter range is generally patterned by snow storms and freezing temperatures at the higher elevations. This migration generally begins in late October and follows the same traditional routes used by deer in the spring. During heavy fall snowstorms, deer will migrate together from the summer range, often making the trip to the winter range in just a few days. As the snowline lowers and the days become progressively shorter, deer concentrate on the winter range for the breeding season, which begins in mid-November. During the cold winter months, deer survive on their stored fat reserves and a subsistence diet composed mainly of a few select shrubs. Deer remain on the winter range until mid-April, after which they begin their spring migration to the higher elevations.

### **Description of Deer Habitats**

Zone X12 is an ecologically diverse zone, supporting a variety of deer habitats distributed across elevations ranging from 5,000-11,000 feet. The zone comprises winter, summer and transition ranges; however, during the archery and general hunting seasons most deer are concentrated on the summer range. Some of the more conspicuous habitat types occupied by deer on the summer range include Great Basin sagebrush, Pinyon-Juniper Woodland, Jeffrey Pine Forest, Montane Chaparral, Montane Riparian Forest, Quaking Aspen, and Subalpine Conifer Forest.

Great Basin sagebrush scrub is the dominant habitat type throughout many areas of the zone, including Conway Summit, Bodie Hills, the northern slope of the Sweetwater Mountains, and the Sonora Junction area, which includes Burcham and Wheeler Flats. This habitat type supports numerous shrub species that provide quality forage and cover for deer, including big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, snowberry, and gooseberry. Pinyon-juniper woodland habitat occurs in association with Great Basin sagebrush scrub on mid-elevational deer transition and summer ranges located on the north side of the Bodie Hills, the Mount Jackson area, the lower elevations of the Sweetwater Mountains, and the mountains adjacent to the communities of Walker, Coleville, and Topaz. Pinyon pine and western juniper, the dominant tree species, provide important thermal and security cover for deer. Jeffrey pine is a dry land forest habitat that dominates vegetation on Sawmill Ridge, near lower Twin Lakes, and many of the major drainages that flow east from the Sierra Nevada. Jeffrey pine habitat typically supports understory shrubs that provide nutritious browse for deer.

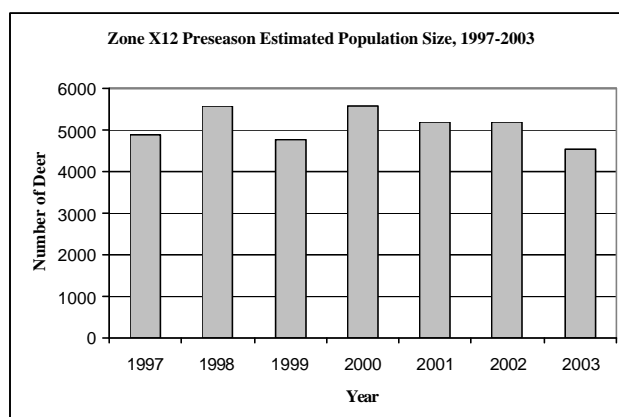
Montane chaparral habitat occurs primarily along the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada and in the Sweetwater Mountains at elevations ranging from 7,000-9,000 feet. This habitat type supports a variety of shrubs that provide deer with nutritious summer browse and dense concealment cover. Some of these shrub species include antelope bitterbush, mountain whitethorne, curleaf mountain mahogany, tobacco brush, and bittercherry. Montane riparian forest is a tree-dominated habitat occurring along the many stream courses that flow east from the Sierra Nevada Crest. Common tree species associated with riparian forest habitat include quaking aspen, lodgepole pine, black cottonwood, and Jeffrey pine. This habitat type also supports various shrubs that provide important forage and cover for deer, including willow, wildrose, and gooseberry. Quaking aspen habitat occurs in scattered, small groves located throughout the Bodie Hills, Sweetwater Mountains, and the east slope of the Sierra Nevada. This important habitat type is heavily used by deer for cover and nutritious forage. Subalpine Conifer Forest is dominated by a mixture of evergreen tree species that occur at higher elevations of the summer range along the Sierra Nevada and in the Sweetwater Mountains.

### **Water Distribution**

Water is generally well distributed throughout Zone X12, especially to the west of Highway 395 along the Sierra Nevada escarpment from the Virginia Lakes drainage, north to Sonora Pass. The multitude of streams and seeps that flow from the Sierra Nevada Crest not only provide water during the warm summer months, but also support the lush forage conditions favored by deer. Habitat conditions to the east of Highway 395 are generally much drier; water is primarily isolated to the meadows and small drainages within the Bodie Hills and the Sweetwater Mountains. Along with the occasional spring or seep, stock watering tanks in Bodie Hills and Sweetwater Mountains also provide important water sources for deer on the summer range.

## **ZONE X12 DEER HERDS AND POPULATION ESTIMATES**

Three migratory deer herds, the East Walker, the Mono Lake, and the West Walker herds, occupy Zone X12. In spring of 2003, these three deer herds had a combined population estimate of 4,540 deer. Radio-telemetry data collected by the Department of Fish and Game indicated that the deer share summer range throughout the zone, with the greatest amount of mixing occurring in the Sweetwater Mountains and along the Sierra Nevada escarpment west of Highway 395 from the Twin Lakes drainage and north to the Walker River drainage.



Herd ratios describe the age class (adult and fawn) and sex class (bucks and does) of the herd. The buck ratio is the number of bucks (spiked or greater) for every one hundred does. The X12 buck ratios (all three herds combined) appear to be increasing from the high teens and twenties in the late 1990s. Since 2000, the ratio has been around 30 bucks per 100 does. The 2003 preseason population has a buck ratio of 29 bucks per 100 does, which indicates that about 16% of the population are bucks.

X12 Buck Ratios, 1997-2003

Year	Buck Ratio
1997	19
1998	20
1999	16
2000	33
2001	27
2002	35
2003	29

## **HUNTING INFORMATION**

### ***Where is a good place to find bucks?***

Deer occur throughout the entire zone during the archery and general hunt seasons. The highest concentration of animals occurs primarily to the west of Highway 395 along the Sierra Nevada. This area is characterized by open sagebrush scrub and montane chaparral brush fields interspersed with lush meadows and groves of aspen and pine forest. Many tributary creeks flow east from the Sierra Nevada Crest and these drainages support perennial water and lush riparian habitat. Deer typically occur in close proximity to these riparian habitats, as well as other areas that provide adequate combinations of food, cover, and water. Vehicle access to the west of Highway 395 is generally limited to improved forest roads within major drainages, such as Virginia Lakes, Green Creek, Twin Lakes, Buckeye Canyon, and the Little Walker River, to name a few. These roads provide access to many smaller, unimproved dirt roads that penetrate into more remote sections of the zone. Specific areas to the west of Highway 395 that hunters may want to investigate include Conway Summit, Dunderberg Creek, Dog Creek, Greek Creek, Buckeye Canyon, Ricky Peak, Flatiron Ridge, Mahogany Ridge, and Silver and Wolf Creeks. Hunters should be aware that significant areas of private land occur within the Bridgeport Valley, Huntoon Valley, Sonora Junction, and Antelope Valley areas.

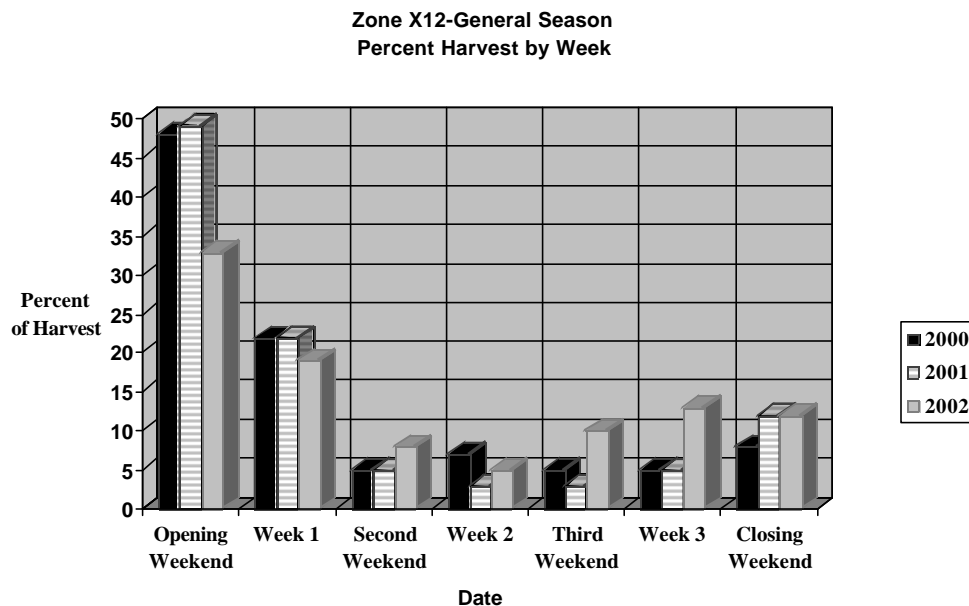
Specific areas to investigate east of Highway 395 include the Bodie Hills and the Sweetwater Mountains. Both areas are high elevation desert ranges supporting vast expanses of sagebrush scrub vegetation dissected by small seasonal meadows, riparian stringers, large aspen groves, and pockets of coniferous forest. In the Bodie Hills, hunters may want to investigate the Bodie Mountain, Potato Peak, and Mount Beideman areas. In the Sweetwater Mountains, hunters may want to explore Lobdell Lake, Swauger Canyon and the Burcham, Cottonwood, and Deep Creek drainages.

Some hunters are interested in hunting areas with good vehicle access, while others seek more remote, hike-in areas away from the opening weekend crowds. During late summer and early fall, many mature bucks

can often be found above tree line, between 9,000-10,500 feet elevation, on open, sparsely vegetated, wind blown ridgelines and mountain tops. This high elevation habitat is generally accessible only to backpackers and hunters with pack stock, and therefore, usually occurs in areas free of human disturbance.

### ***When should I go hunting?***

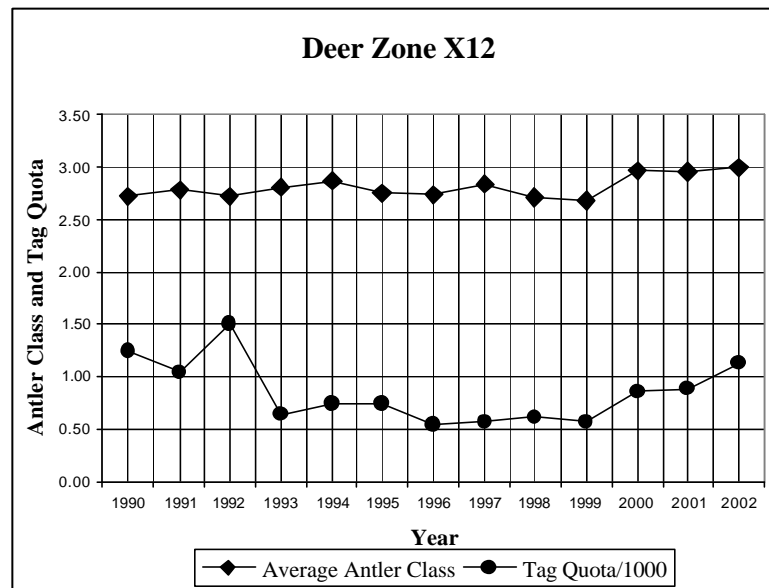
The graph below shows the timing and intensity of the buck harvest over the last three general seasons (2000-2002).



During each of the three years shown in the graph, a disproportionate (35% - 50%) amount of harvest occurred during the first weekend of the general season. This “higher” harvest may be attributed to the greater number of hunters in the field during opening weekend and to the higher number of bucks available to hunters during the early season. Other factors, including weather and forage conditions, water availability, moon phase, and hunting pressure, may have also influenced hunter success. Hunter harvest, along with hunter pressure, generally declined during the second and third weeks of the season and then increased again during the closing weekend. Periods of cold, inclement weather during the later part of the general season can stimulate some deer to migrate from the summer range. Hunters who concentrate their efforts along migration routes leading from the summer range could increase their chance of harvesting one of these late season migrants.

### ***What is the average number of antler points?***

The figure below shows the average antler class of harvested buck and the tag quota by year for the general hunt in Zone X12. Special hunts within the zone and unclassified or unreported bucks are not included. Harvest data collected by the Department over the last three years indicate that 35% of the bucks harvested in Zone X12 were forked-horns, 35% were three-pointers, 27% were four pointers, and 3% were 5 points or greater.



### ***What are my chances of filling my tag?***

The estimated percent hunter success will give you an idea of your chances to harvest a buck. The table below shows the estimated percent hunter success in all of the X zones and the statewide average over the past 10 years. In 2002, 16% of the X12 tag holders harvested a buck, and 9% of the A20 tag holders harvested a buck.

**X Zones and Statewide Average Percent Hunter Success by Year, 1993-2002.**

Zone or Hunt	Year									
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
X9A	38	45	22	35	31	26	33	27	27	29
X9B	20	20	16	16	21	17	20	18	16	31
X9C	15	13	9	9	8	7	11	12	9	7
X12	34	39	17	30	30	29	32	29	20	16
A16 (X9A Archery)	n/a	7	4	14	9	16	12	13	9	16
A17 (X9B Archery)	n/a	0	0	3	5	0	4	0	4	0
A18 (X9C Archery)	n/a	11	0	7	0	0	27	3	12	3
A20 (X12 Archery)	n/a	15	10	14	13	16	12	14	13	9
Statewide Average*	19	22	16	22	20	18	17	21	18	17

\*Statewide average from 1993 – 1998 does not include Additional or Private Lands Management hunts.

## **GETTING PREPARED**

### **MAPS, TRAVEL, WEATHER, AND CAMPING**

#### **MAPS**

The enclosed Deer Hunt Zone X12 map identifies most of the locations mentioned in this insert. A map showing land ownership is available online at [www.dfg.ca.gov/hunting/deer/deer\\_maps.html](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hunting/deer/deer_maps.html). For maps with more detail, please utilize the sources mentioned in this section. The USFS Toiyabe National Forest map and the Bridgeport Valley and the Excelsior Mountains BLM maps are good sources to purchase. These maps can be obtained by contacting the USFS, Toiyabe National Forest at (760) 932-7070, White Mountain Ranger Station at (760) 872-2500, or to order maps online visit the BLM website bookstore at [www.ca.blm.gov](http://www.ca.blm.gov). The “Northern California Atlas and Gazetteer” by DeLorme Mapping Company, available at bookstores or call (207) 846-7000 to order, provides a good, large-scale overview of roads within the zone boundaries. More detail is provided in USGS topographical maps, available at specialty stores, such as camping and hiking products retailers, or directly from the U.S. Geological Distribution Center, Denver Federal Center, Building 810, Box 25286, Denver CO 80225, telephone (303) 236-7477. The Bridgeport California-Nevada 1:100,000-scale topographic map is a preferred choice of many outdoorsmen. The Walker Lake, Nevada-California and the Mariposa, California 1:250,000-scale topographical maps also include the zone. Some specific 7.5-minute quadrangle maps of the zone are Twin Lakes, Bridgeport, Bodie, Kirkwood Spring, Fales Hot Springs, Pickle Meadow, Dunderberg Peak, Sawmill Ridge, Big Alkali, Dome Hill, Buckeye Ridge, Matterhorn Peak, Mount Jackson, Mount Patterson, Chris Flat, Fales Hot Springs, Lost Cannon Peak, Tower Peak, Coleville, and Wolf Creek. And finally, another map that may be of value is the Rand McNally Road Atlas-United States.

#### **TRAVEL TIPS**

Zone X12 encompasses a large geographic area with topography ranging from flat in the lower elevation valleys to very steep and rocky in the higher mountains of the Sierra Nevada. Most services are located within the various towns scattered along the base of the Sierra Nevada escarpment, including Lee Vining, Mammoth Lakes, Bridgeport, Walker, Coleville, and Bishop. Hunters are advised to have full gasoline tanks when entering the field and to carry snow chains, shovel, serviceable spare tire, and extra food and water. Four-wheel-drive vehicles should be used when traveling on unimproved roads within the zone. Be sure to use extra caution when driving off-road, and check with USFS or BLM regarding any vehicle travel restrictions that may be in place.

#### **WEATHER**

Warm days and cold nights with below freezing temperatures are common during the first half of the season. During the later half of the season, cool days and cold nights are the general rule, with snow often developing at the higher elevations.

#### **CAMPING**

***The California Department of Fish and Game is providing this information as a service and has no control over fees and services. Please contact the appropriate agencies regarding fee information, camping restrictions, and other regulations.*** There are numerous campgrounds located on public lands within Zone X12, many of which are open until the end of October. USFS, BLM, Mono County, and other camping facilities are outlined below. For areas where dispersed camping is allowed, you need to obtain a California Campfire Permit for the use of any open flame (including gas stoves, lanterns, wood fires, charcoal fires, or smoking). These permits can be obtained at no cost from any National Forest Ranger Station, BLM office, or Visitor Center. Open flame of any kind may be restricted during times of high fire

danger; check with the local Forest Service office for current restrictions. For reservable campsites, call the National Recreation Reservation Center at 1-877-444-6777 or visit their website at [www.reserveusa.com](http://www.reserveusa.com).

#### **U.S. FOREST SERVICE CAMPGROUNDS**

Contact the U.S. Forest Service, Toiyabe National Forest, P.O. Box 595, Bridgeport, CA, 93517, phone (760) 932-7070. It is located on U.S. Hwy 395 about 1 mile south of Bridgeport.

#### **U.S. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT CAMPGROUNDS**

Contact the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514, phone (760) 872-5000 or visit their website at [www.ca.blm.gov](http://www.ca.blm.gov) and click on Recreation Search.

#### **MONO COUNTY CAMPGROUNDS**

The Department of Parks and Recreation is located at the County Services Building, P.O. Box 237 Independence, CA 93526, phone (760)878-0272 or visit [www.395.com](http://www.395.com) for camping information in Mono County.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

California Department of Fish and Game, Bishop Field Office (760) 872-1171

U.S. Forest Service, Inyo National Forest (760) 873-2408

U.S. Bureau of Land Management, Bishop Office (760) 872-5000